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## The House Wren: Adaptable to Human Activity

*By Kathie Driscoll*

The House Wren, a common backyard bird, is well known for its “chutzpa”. This particular bird will nest at your front door, in a wreath, shoe, door bell buzzer or, in my case, a house plant on my tiny apartment’s porch. Across the way is a nice little shrubby, wooded area; a safe haven for raising offspring. However my pair of wrens decided my porch was safe to rear their young, in spite of my goings-on.

The House Wren nesting behavior is precarious at best. This bird's rich bubbly song is commonly heard during the nesting season but rarely afterwards. The male then seeks an appropriate nesting area, where he builds several “dummy” nests. The females will either chose one of his nests when she arrives or pick another location of her liking. (I personally would love to see the communication between the two birds, when that happens!)

The House Wren’s nest is called nest cavity. Both female and male wrens are very territorial of their cavity. If other nest cavity birds build near their territory such as, a Tree Swallow or Eastern Bluebird, they will attack the eggs or destroy their nests. As a witness to their behavior towards a human, I can attest they both defend the nest with fervor towards me. Simply hanging laundry has become the battle of the wills between the pair and myself!

The female will have a clutch size of 6 to 8 eggs; laying one egg per day until the clutch is complete. The incubation period, the time the female remains faith and devoted to her offspring is 13 to 15 days. If she is fortunate, the male will feed her during this critical period. Although I have not seen the male offer such comfort towards his mate, I had the opportunity to see their unique nesting behavior while trying to dry out their host plant. The female raced out of the nest to allow me to glimpse at 5 small white and brown speckled eggs. She watched me from the nearby wood while the male informed me of his displeasure by screeching a distress call (which is not a sweet lyrical song at all) and swooping close to me. I watched this behavior and was fascinated between their communication between the two. The female would abandon the nest to a nearby branch and start her distress call to her mate, who suddenly arrived from what I thought was nowhere. They would call to each other. Then he would bob and weave at me while screeching until I left my porch, and disappear as quickly as he came. Once convinced I was out of sight, the female would fly with acrobatic ease to the nest. Their commitment to their brood was commendable.

The House Wren is not a popular bird among most homeowners, because it adapts readily to urban living, with little concern of dwelling location or material. It is aggressive towards other cavity dwellers for *Lebensraum* (which means living space or “hey, I was here first and I will kill for this prime real estate”). They greet a person with the surprise of a heart attack and they leave

behind mite ridden nest when all fly the coop. In spite of all that, the House Wren offers us an opportunity to observe the life of a bird up close. My family now has nestlings with eyes shut and mouths wide open, and I can't wait to witness the parent's job of kicking out of the nest successfully. I would say this event exceeds my experience of hearing an untimely call of an elusive Rose-breasted Grosbeak last fall.

<http://www.wild-bird-watching.com/House-Wren.html>

[http://www.birds.cornell.edu/nestinginfo/bios/sp\\_accts/howr#Physical%20](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/nestinginfo/bios/sp_accts/howr#Physical%20)

<http://birdsbybent.netfirms.com/ch21-30/hwren.html>

<http://www.sialis.org/howrbio.htm>